The Use of Chivalry as a Binding Force in Public Events Within Four Sir Gawain Romances

by

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ABSTRACT

While tournaments, duels, and challenges were analyzed within literary texts prior to the 1980's, the most recent trend in scholarship has been to focus on how these proceedings fit into a historical context. Many authors have noted how medieval rulers used tournaments, duels, and challenges as a way to keep their militaristic knights under control; however, there has been relatively little study on the way that these three events function as a means of social control in medieval romances. This paper examines how the public nature of these events and the chivalric nature of their participants combine to subvert the agency of not only the nobles, but also King Arthur himself in four of the Sir Gawain romances, "Ywain and Gawain", "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain", "The Awntyrs off Arthur at the Terne Wathelyne" and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

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INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to consider the use of food or games to eliminate political agency without referencing Juvénal's "Satura X". In his text, Juvénal states:

> Iam priden, ex quo suffragia nulli
> vendimus, effudit curas; nam qui dabat olim
> imperium fasces legions omnia, nunc se
> continent atque duas tantum res anxius optat,
> panem et circenses. (Juvénal 77-81)
> (Already a long time ago, from which we did not sell any votes, [the people] have shed their cares; for once the people, who were offering empire, offices, legions, and everything, now hold themselves and anxiously wish for two great things, bread and circuses.)

While Juvenal created this work to address the growing political apathy in ancient Rome, when one analyzes public events in medieval romances, he or she cannot help but notice how some of Juvenal's ideas resonate in the poems. This seems to be particularly true when it comes to use of challenges, judicial duels, and tournaments. Whereas one can easily make a connection between medieval public events and Roman gladiator games, the chivalric code, which governs those who participate in medieval affairs, has no classical equivalent. It is the addition of the chivalric code which, when analyzed in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, "Sir Gologras and Sir Gawain," "Ywain and Gawain," and "The Awntyrs off Arthur at the Terne

Wathelyne," serves to add a binding agent to both King Arthur and the aristocrats' power that is not present in a classical context. These four poems were chosen because out of all the Sir Gawain poems, which are numerous and vary as to their quality, these four spend the most time on tournaments, duels, and challenges, and offer the most interiority regarding the participants' and audience's feelings of the events. The goal of this paper is to analyze how the public affairs, specifically tournaments, judicial duels, and challenges, and the chivalric code combine to actually limit the political power of the characters within the poems to such an extent that they in effect become bound by the games in which they play.

Review of the Literature

There is surprisingly little research being done today in regard to the tournament tradition in Middle English poems, and if one takes the critical theory of structuralism into account, one has to wonder if there is not more to the generic convention of the tournament than first appears. One would believe that with society's obsession with looking for governmental conspiracy theories the tournament tradition would send up a big, red banner; however, most of the research being done today on medieval tournaments and the duels and challenges that took place within the list is from a historical perspective in which scholars analyze the society's imitations of the literature that they so adore. In fact, many current texts today consider older examinations of tournaments and other public events, which relied more heavily on romantic literature, to be outdated and inaccurate because they relied on romances instead of historical documents. Indeed, Juliet Barker in her monograph *The Tournament in England: 1100-1400* describes older books as being "too heavily reliant on romance literature as source material" (2). This recent fascination with the historical truth behind duels, tournaments, and challenges, instead of their role within literature, has led to many excellent historical texts that paint a detailed picture of the games throughout the Middle Ages. Conversely, this historical research shows a lack of analysis as to how exactly tournaments, judicial duels, and challenges are able to function in such a way as to lull their participants and spectators

into a hypnotic fascination with the entertainment that they provide and how it slowly distracts them from actually understanding the political issues present on the playing field in Middle English romances. This review attempts to understand this gap by discussing the major topics associated with these three spectacles including: the tournament itself, violence in medieval societies, how games are used to lessen that violence inherent within tournaments, duels, and challenges, chivalry and how it controls the contenders' actions, how duels and challenges relate to tournaments, and the military aspect associated with these events.

Naturally when one begins researching how tournaments can be used in Middle English romances to subvert political agency, one must begin the research with the tournament itself. Tournaments are best defined as events which resemble war and occur either *à outrance,* meaning the combatants use sharpened battle weapons to defeat their opponents, or *à plaisance*, meaning the participants use less dangerous arms because the intention is to entertain for an audience rather than to harm so that the knights have a chance to practice their skills and gain fame for their prowess (Higgens 115-116). As previously stated, recent scholarship on the tournament, going back about 30 years, tends to focus on the historical aspect of the portrayal of tournaments; however, older texts such as F.H. Cripps-Day's *The History of the Tournament in France and England* and R.C. Clephan's *The Tournament: Its Periods and Phases* use romantic literature as sources

instead of only relying on historical documents (Barker 2). Steven I. Pederson's work *The Tournament Tradition and Staging* 'The Castle of Perseverance' follows in this mold in that his text attempts to analyze the depiction of tournaments in *The Castle of Perseverance*, but his method of analysis predicts future scholarship because he draws on more historical data and applies it to a fictional tournament, instead of applying fictional information to a fictional tournament. Barker's seminal text *The Tournament in England: 1100-1400*, which was published three years after Pederson's in 1986, appears to be the first text that goes through and discusses almost every aspect of the tournament; moreover, her concern is not literary in that she mainly focuses on establishing the facts of the tournament, not applying them to any other texts. Barker accomplishes this by examining public records from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and historical manuscripts depicting facts about the tournaments they describe.

Once one reads the above texts and examines Barker's introduction, in which she credits Dr. Juliet Vale, one is automatically led in the direction of violence and how it functions as an underlying thread throughout medieval occasions. While many sources touch on the violence in tournaments, duels, and challenges, including those that deal with chivalry, Deborah Ann Higgens calls specific attention to how violence functions in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in her article "Tournament and Protocol in Fitt I of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*", published in 1999. This article builds on

Maurice Keen's text *Chivalry*, which will be discussed later, and uses his argument about "masculine violence" as a springboard into her essay in which she analyzes the confrontation between the Green Knight and Sir Gawain and the audience's reaction to the event (qtd. in Higgens 115). One year after Higgen's article was published, Richard W. Kaeuper edited an anthology called *Violence in Medieval Society*, which as its name suggests is devoted to analyzing violence in medieval society. The essays in this anthology are divided into five parts, but this paper will pay specific attention to the essays by Juliet and Malcolm Vale in Part IV, "Courtly Society and Violence". Juliet Vale's essay "Violence and the Tournament" in particular focuses on how the tournament has the power to disrupt the fragile "civil equilibrium" and how its violence must be carefully managed so that it does not function like a time bomb (143).

The other way in which violence, and its relation to the tournament, is addressed is when scholars focus on how courtly play and an ambiance of entertainment is used to dilute the tournament's violent nature. One of the first authors to discuss the theatrical nature of the tournament was Glynne Wickham in his book *Early English Stages: 1300 to 1660*. Volume one of Wickham's series is devoted to the analysis of medieval entertainment, including the tournament, and how both the medieval drama and "open-air" entertainments can be seen as a precursor to the Renaissance theater (Wickham xiii). Wickham's connection of the events which took place within

the medieval arena to the theater in that they are both modes of entertainment, seems to be an innovative idea because I did not find another source arguing the same concept that was published prior to *Early English Stages*.

Several other essays and articles seem to build on the ideas of Barker, Juliet Vale, and Wickham in regard to entertainment and the violent nature of the three events. One such source, which quotes all three scholars, was published in *The Chaucer Review* in 2009 by Carl Grey Martin and is called "The Cipher of Chivalry: Violence as Courtly Play in the World of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*". Martin's article does an excellent job of using *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to highlight the fact that those who watch the beheading game use the fact that it is a "game" to "[subliminate]" the horror of the event (311). Martin Steven's article, which was published in *Speculum*, titled "Laughter and Game in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" also deals with the role that fun and games take in the poem; however, Steven argues that sports are "a surrogate for physical combat" and that the violent games reflect the inner nature of a suppressed society (66). Steven's article is not the only who discusses the role of games and theatricality in the tournament tradition. In Victor Scherb's essay "The Tournament of Power: Public Combat and Social Inferiority in Late Medieval England", which was published in the journal *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* in 1991, Scherb briefly discusses Wickham's work in his introduction when he

declares that the seating arrangement of the tournament lists was so carefully constructed that it served to allow "the noble part of the audience to become themselves a part of the theatrical spectacle of the tournament", before he goes on to describe in his paper how the tournament "was a set of social practices and symbols which functioned to re-state, reaffirm and reinforce the power of nobility" for the upper class and lower class events, like those portrayed in "The Tournament of Tottenham", "focuses on "the poor professions, inappropriate weapons, degrading violence, and chaotic inversions" that occur when peasants attempt to imitate the upper classes. (109; 117-118. It is the people who watch these events, which as Scherb mentions are meant to reaffirm their culture, who allow themselves to be absorbed into the event via their role as spectators.

The value that ultimately functions as a lid on the violence of medieval society, both in and outside of the tournament, is chivalry. The chivalric code cannot be overlooked in a study of the medieval entertainment because it is woven into the psyche of almost every fictional knight in the Sir Gawain romances. A knight's duty to adhere to the chivalric ideal is of course one of the generic conventions of medieval romance, but it is sometimes easy to overlook chivalry as a means of social control. The monograph *Chivalry* by Maurice Keen serves as a thorough introduction to the topic, but chapter twelve on chivalry and war is particularly interesting because Keen points out that it is the idolization and romanticized image of the medieval knight

that caused them, and by extension the tournament, to rise to social prominence. Another essay which addresses the concept of chivalry, mostly in how it relates to King Henri II of France, is Helmut Nickel's "The Tournament: An Historical Sketch" in the anthology *The Study of Chivalry*. Despite the fact that Nickel places his emphasis on the French tradition, his discussion of tournaments that were hosted by peasants at "country fairs" in which the participants donned pseudo armor while wielding brooms and hay forks as weapons is significantly more interesting and illuminates what happens when the nobility, wealth, and chivalry were stripped from the tournaments (238).

One area in which chivalry seems to become muddled within the realm of public demonstrations is when duels are held in the arena in the form of a duel or challenge between just two contenders in order to settle a dispute. The second chapter in Ben Trumen's text *The Field of Honor* provides a history of the judicial duel, or trial by wager, and while it does not mention how the tournament ties into judicial duels, one can easily see the parallels between his examples and the battle of the two sisters in "Ywain and Gawain." When one considers the idea that in a duel God himself was supposed to look down and protect the innocent party, while simultaneously punishing the guilty one, it strikes an off-tune note when one combines a holy judgment with the tournament, which in "Ywain and Gawain" is made public for entertainment's sake. On a similar note, chapter nine of Keen's text

Nobles, Knights, and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages also addresses trials, the particular types of trials that can be held, in which court they can be tried, either common, military, or the Court of Chivalry, and what the sanctions can be if the defendant is found guilty (156). This text allows readers to understand what trial and punishment could be handed down against those who "committed acts of war against the king in his realm" and how these punishments were connected to the tournament and other public events (156). By establishing an understanding of duels, trial by wagers, challenges, and how punishments are determined and meted out, readers develop a more thorough understanding of why this judicial process takes place in a tournament setting.

Furthermore, it is almost impossible to ignore the militaristic overtones that feature strongly in romances. As both Barker and Juliet Vale discuss in their works, the tournament was a way to keep soldiers in shape, so to speak, for war. Keen's monograph *Nobles, Knights, and Men-At-Arms in the Middle Ages*, which was previously mentioned in regard to its connection to duels, also focuses on the relationships between the knights themselves and their king. Chapter three of the text discusses "the all-pervading nature of [the oath of brotherhood]" and how "it meant implicit trust" (Keen 44). The idea that competing in tournaments, or practice battles, forms the type of relationships among the combatants that leads to being fierce shieldmates on the battlefield is an interesting one because it

allows the reader to understand how ingrained the tournament and other events which take place in the list must be in medieval literature and society for knights to risk harming their friends and future allies. Michael Prestwich's work *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, in which he discusses the different types of tournaments and how chivalry is used as a mortar of sorts to bind the knights together under their king in both the tournament and on the battlefield, shows readers that King Arthur, in chivalric romances, needs chivalry. To elaborate, Arthur is bound by the chivalric ideal, because without some code of honor he could essentially lose control of well-trained, deadly warriors.

Violence, duels and challenges, militaristic aspects, chivalry, and the playful overtones of these events are all important aspects that one must consider before one can analyze the structure within literature. As Erik Gunderson describes in his article "The Ideology of the Arena," in which he thoroughly discusses almost everything there is to know about Roman gladiator games, structures that function as entertainment in a society are almost never only entertaining. As a matter of fact, there are many political, sociological, and even psychological effects that are inherent in the tournament that cannot be ignored and glanced over as a mere generic convention because to do so would overlook this institution as a powerful force of social control.

CHAPTER 1

The Chivalric Ideal's Power over King Arthur in a Public Sphere

As king he is subject to the traditions and expectations of his people.

C.S. Lewis

As touched upon in the Review of the Literature, if one wishes to analyze the role of kings and how the tournament relates to their place in medieval history, there are many excellent texts that can be examined. There are relatively few texts, however, that examine how kings utilize the tournament in Middle English romances. This is particularly surprising considering the important role the tournament plays in the Matter of Britain. Indeed, many romances contain either a tournament, judicial duel, or challenge in which the overtones of chivalry and entertainment are heavily woven. Nevertheless, King Arthur's role in these affairs, unlike that of his real life counterparts, seems greatly reduced within the context of "Ywain and Gawain" and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. To explain, Arthur, who is supposed to possess absolute power in his realm, is bound so heavily by his devotion to the chivalric ideal and its conventions that when placed in a public environment that relies heavily on chivalry and serves to entertain an audience, such as a judicial duel or challenge disguised as a game, Arthur's authority as a king is greatly reduced. In fact, it seems that Arthur's supremacy is so greatly hindered in these circumstances in both poems that his role in the events is reduced from ruler to participant.

Before one can understand how King Arthur is bound by the chivalric code, an understanding of the code itself must be established. Chivalry, upon which the chivalric code is based, is a difficult term to define because it functions somewhat fluidly according to the text in which it is used. Maurice Keen puts forth several different definitions of chivalry in the introduction of his monograph *Chivalry*; perhaps his best definition of the term is when he states:

> Chivalry is spoken of as an order, as if knighthood ought to be compared to an order of religion: sometimes it is spoken of as an estate, a social class- the warrior class whose martial function, according to medieval writers, was to defend the *patria* and the Church. (2)

Keen goes on to clarify that the principal virtues used by medieval authors in connotation with chivalry are "*prouesse*, *loyauté*, *largesse* (generosity), *courtoise*, and *franchise* (the free and frank bearing that is visible testimony to the combination of good birth with virtue)" (2). Over a decade later in the text *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, Richard W. Kaeuper expands and conflates Keen's definitions and conventions to define chivalry as "the composite, enduring ideal represented by courtesy, prowess (easily sanitized as moral courage), largesse, loyalty, 'courtly love', fairness, [and] piety (even 'muscular Christianity')" (34). Both Keen's and Kaeuper's definitions and virtues combine to paint a picture of a group of noble-born knights who are expected to adhere to a certain behavioral code as a condition of their

participation in their order. This group also seeks to keep peace and order in the kingdom while helping those in need. Furthermore, the order's allegiance is with the church and its doctrine due to their emphasis on largesse and piety.

Now while King Arthur takes great care to adhere to this code in the romances that will be discussed in this thesis, many historical, medieval monarchs were not as careful because they saw themselves as being above the law due to their birthright. In England during the medieval period, the widely held belief was that their ruler was appointed by God and ruled through Divine Right, meaning that to go against the king was to defy God's will. Now this did cause tension between religious leaders and the monarchs, which famously came to a head when King John was forced to sign the Magna Carta, but the fact remains that many of the rulers' citizens viewed him or her as being above them because he or she held a higher position on the Chain of Being. Also, because that ruler was appointed by God himself to watch over the land that he or she ruled, they had absolute power and ownership over their realm, meaning all of the people in the kingdom were limited in what they could do and how they could live by their ruler. Now if the kings had followed the chivalric code and tried to be loyal, generous, and courteous in all of their doings, then having such immense power concentrated into one person would not have been a problem; however,

anyone with a basic understanding of history knows that medieval kings and queens were not always known for possessing all of those virtues.

Before one can understand how deeply the chivalric ideal and the legend of King Arthur are interwoven in later medieval romances, a brief examination of the king within the legend is needed. King Arthur first appears in Latin histories, such as those by Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth. In those histories, he is portrayed as a *dux bellorum* (duke of battles) and is known for his military strength and ability to conquer his enemies. It was not until Chrétien de Troyes' French romances that Arthur begins to be associated with the Round Table and "a code that involves championing women and the weak and punishing evildoers" (Lupack 432). Chrétien's portrayal of the king as a chivalric leader proved more long lasting than that of the histories because his is the version of which almost all of medieval romances are based. These tales transform Arthur into the embodiment of the chivalric code, and the way of life that it dictates, so much so that *Lancelot do Lac* claims "[E]veryone would be disinherited and ruined if King Arthur were overthrown" (qtd. in Kaeuper 93).

While Arthur is depicted as one of England's strongest kings in literature, in the poem "Ywain and Gawain" his power concerning judicial matters appears to be limited in the episode in which he is forced to handle a land dispute. Now, according to Ben Truman in his text *The Field of Honor*, in cases of murder, treason, or civil cases which required a decision, the

accused had the right to request a judicial duel, or trial by wager, to determine his guilt rather than going through a trial presided over by the king or an appointed judge (30). Furthermore, if the accused, or the champion who was appointed to represent the accused, won the battle then he or she would be cleared of all charges (Truman 30). In "Ywain and Gawain" the dispute lies not in a criminal matter, such as murder or treason, but in a civil matter regarding an inheritance battle between two sisters. When a great lord died, "lifand he had none other ayre / bot two doghters that war ful fayre", meaning that because the man did not have a son and left no instructions as to who should receive his property, the two sisters are supposed to share his land and possessions ("Ywain and Gawain" 2747-2748). However, the older sister wants to be the sole recipient of the inheritance, so she decides to attempt to manipulate the system by requesting a trial by wager in the form of a joust. The moment the older sister arrives at court she goes to secure Sir Gawain as her champion because women were not expected to represent themselves (Truman 10). Indeed, it is only after Gawain denies the younger sister his help, because he has already promised the older sister, that Arthur is involved in the process at all. Due to the fact that there is no knight at court whom Arthur believes can stand up to Sir Gawain, he gives the younger sister "respite of fourti dais, / als it fel to landes lays" to go find the knight who fights with a lion ("Ywain and Gawain" 2791-2792). What is interesting about this event is despite the fact that it seems obvious to

readers that King Arthur should just void the judicial duel and order that the older sister share with the younger, he will not step in and do so because he cannot violate the chivalric code and its *courtoise* convention by denying a noble woman in need of assistance the right to a champion after she has already secured one (Keen 2). Indeed, the most he does is follow the laws of the land and allows the younger sister a forty-day respite so that she can seek a champion who has the potential to win the challenge against Sir Gawain.

The key to understanding the older sister's ability to manipulate Sir Gawain into serving as her champion and, more importantly, King Arthur into allowing the duel to be held lies within the romantic convention of courtly love and the courtesy that it orders knights to pay to their lovers. According to C.S. Lewis in his seminal work *The Allegory of Love*, the relationship between a lady and her knight is that of a "feudal superior" to her vassal because the tradition was originally born out of the loving relationship between a subject and his ruler; it was only with the addition of a woman, who held a superior rank, that the idea of romantic love was thrown into the mix (13). When Lewis describes this relationship, he is referring to the feelings between a knight and his lady; however, as he also states the tradition grows to such an extreme that it is not just the knight's lady whom he must please, but he must attempt to accomplish the bidding "of any lady" because it is a knight's "duty to do honour to all woman kind"

(Lewis 7; *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* 32). When this is taken into account, it is easy to see not only why Gawain agrees to represent the well-born lady, but also why King Arthur lets her proceed with her travesty, because the King must attempt to do the bidding of both lady-sisters, even if he believes that one is in the wrong.

While the idea that the older sister in "Ywain and Gawain" is manipulating the system so that Arthur would have trouble throwing out her complaint without violating her right as a noble lady to a champion seems like a lot for the King to handle, the fact that trial by wagers were seen as being in the celestial kingdom, where guilt was determined by the "Great Arbiter," further complicates the matter (Truman 10). This means that once the elder sister has appealed for a judicial duel, it would be almost hubristic of Arthur to overrule her and declare himself in charge of her complaints because he would effectively be saying that he is more qualified to judge the situation than God, which violates the chivalric ideal's convention of piety. So despite the fact that the narrator tells the audience that the King knows that "sho [the older sister] had the wrang," he does not step in and use his power as the king to solve this matter until Gawain and Ywain discover each others' identities and refuse to fight any more, because to step in and take the role of judge away from God would be viewed as inappropriate ("Ywain and Gawain" 3444). In fact, the most that Arthur does to try to end the event is that he "bisoght / whether the elder wald or noght / that he sold evin the

lanndes dele" between the two sisters ("Ywain and Gawain" 3581-3583). The narrator's choice of the verb "bisoght" to describe Arthur's address to the older sister, not ordered or recommended, is particularly interesting because not only is it hard to imagine a king beseeching a woman who is trying to steal from her own sister, but the narrator also uses it again later in the duel when he describes some of the knights' reactions to the duel. Indeed, once the knights understand all of the politics behind the confrontation they

> Held al with the yonger may.
>
> And to the King al thai bisoght,
>
> Whether the elder wald or noght,
>
> That he sold evin the landes dele,
>
> And gif the yonger damysele
>
> The half (or els sum porciowne
>
> That sho mai have to warisowne). ("Ywain and Gawain" 3580-3586)

The fact that the narrator tells the readers that the attending knights are beseeching Arthur to divide the land in half and end the event, and the King in turn is beseeching the older sister to share her father's legacy shows that Arthur is choosing to allow the duel to continue, despite the fact that he is aware that the older sister is in the wrong.

Along with the fact that the elder sister uses the trial by wager to circumvent King Arthur in both a political and judicial manner, one must also remember that all of Arthur's actions and reactions to this situation take

place in the public arena. This means that his court, which holds him to just as high a chivalric standard as he holds every other knight, is watching the entire proceeding and will notice if he does anything to tarnish his chivalrous reputation. Now, while the author never deliberately tells the audience that this is an open event, the public nature of the episode can be inferred from contextual clues. Two such clues are when the narrator specifically tells the audience that Gawain chooses not to wear his own armor so that "he wald noght in court be knawyn" and that "the elder sister to court come" on the day of the proceeding ("Ywain and Gawain" 3401; 3421). Also, while it could be argued that Gawain's concern about his identity is unfounded because many members of the court could simply refuse to come to the event, this is unlikely because judicial duels in both England and France "were characterized by remarkable ceremonious proceeding" (Truman 31). This evidence subtly informs readers that the event takes place with a certain amount of pomp and circumstance before the lords and ladies; that is why Gawain seeks to conceal the fact that he is acting as champion to the elder sister's cause. The fact that this trial takes place in front of the members of the aristocracy, despite the fact that it is supposed to be a competition between two knights during which God will ensure that the correct sister triumphs, transforms the event into a form of entertainment that entertains the court and ensures that Arthur's handling of the event is always in the public sphere. This affair, while not exactly like the tournament, has in

common with it that both occurrences gather a crowd that seems to have its interests vested in its entertainment value, rather than its judicial happenings.

The public nature of the event and his determination to uphold his reputation as a paragon of chivalry limits Arthur's ability to govern as a king much more so than that his historical counterparts because his is unwilling to make choices that can be seen as violating the chivalric code. If he did decide to break the chivalric code and do something such as punishing the elder sister in "Ywain and Gawain," then he would set a negative example for his followers and show that the rules they choose to adhere to are negotiable instead of mandatory. Juliet Barker in her text *The Tournament in England: 1100-1400* states that the tournament, which could have been "an instrument for rebellion, private war and vendetta," was transformed into "an invaluable propaganda machine" by medieval rulers (1). Again, it is hard to imagine several different medieval rulers putting aside their own personal feeling on a subject in order to live up to a strict moral code. Also, because the king was viewed as holding a higher ranking on the Divine Chain of Being, it was "by right and duty [that the] kings were assumed to work to secure basic order in society" (Kaeuper 93). Due to Arthur's choosing to adhere to the strict moral code, he is commanded to aid noble women, defer to God, and behave honorably in all of his dealings. In this specific instance, because the inheritance quarrel takes place in the public sphere where any

error the king makes will quickly become the court gossip, he is forced into watching a travesty of an event that he should be easily able to stop because it is his right to keep order in his kingdom. Nevertheless, if Arthur did choose to exercise his right to act after the elder sister had already made her plea to Gawain, by denying her the duel even though the knight already agreed to represent her in the encounter, then he could no longer expect to lead his chivalric order because he would prove himself to be lacking in *courtoise, franchise,* and piety, and a ruler who proves himself deficient in the virtues that he requires of his followers proves to them that he is unfit to lead (Keen 2).

Another text in which Arthur finds his role of king subverted by the chivalric code and the public nature of an encounter is in the first fitt of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when he has to volunteer to face the Green Knight despite the fact there is a banquet hall full of knights in the room. It is an accepted principle that because a country has many soldiers, or in this case knights, but only one king, it makes more sense to send a knight to fight in a dangerous "gomen" than it does to sent the heirless monarch into battle against a giant, green monster carrying an ax (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 283). However, when the Green Knight calls for "any freke be so felle to fonde that I telle," the narrator tells the audience that "he hem stouned upon first, stiller were thanne / alle the heredmen in halle" (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 291; 301-302). While the knights should take this as an

opportunity to prove their *prouesse* and their *loyauté* to their king, instead they sit there too scared to act. Now if the Green Knight had challenged a knight in a private setting or if they did not have to adhere to the chivalric code, then they could have denied the giant's request. Nevertheless, Arthur cannot allow the Green Knight's challenge to go unanswered in his hall because then the contender's statement that "the revel and the renoun of the Rounde Table / overwalt with a worde" will be proved true and Arthur will be portrayed as the king of cowards who are chivalric in name only in front of everyone at the feast because none of his knights is brave enough to take up the challenge (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 313-314).

Despite the fact that the knights should stand up to the Green Knight to prove their reputations to be true, they do not do so and Arthur is forced to step up and take the challenge even though it is a politically unsound decision. Whether the other knights recognize the danger that the Green Knight presents to their own lives should they choose to enter into his game or are too stunned at his entrance and the idea that they may have to fight to act, Arthur himself seems unable to see beyond the chivalric repercussions to the political ramifications of his agreeing to take a blow to the head with an ax. Early in the fitt, the narrator takes time to paint Arthur as the type of king who:

> Wolde not ete til al were served,
>
> He watz so joly of his joyfnes, and sumquat childgered:

His lif liked hym light, he lovied the lass

Auther to lone lye or longe sitte,

So bisied him his yonge blod and his brayn wylde. (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 85-89)

This passage portrays a king who is so mesmerized by the fabulous tales of chivalric action that he fails to recognize the danger associated with the adventures that it takes to create such stories. Carl Martin in his article "The Cipher of Chivalry" puts it well when he states "chivalry allowed… the man-at-arms [to] sublimat[e] the horrors of physical destruction, especially the mutilation and ruin in combat of the human body" (311). It is no wonder, once the reader considers Arthur's youthful disposition, that the boy-king will risk his life to uphold the chivalric reputation in which he puts such stock, because in the stories that he is used to hearing the hero, the good guy, never dies because knights conquer giants and monsters, not the other way around. Indeed, it is only Sir Gawain who realizes that Camelot cannot lose its heirless ruler, young though he may be, so he stands up and volunteers to play the Green Knight's dangerous game to uphold the reputation of the kingdom.

When Gawain volunteers to take Arthur's place in the Green Knight's game, he does save his king, but in doing so he also reduces his liege to someone who must be saved because not only does he make rash decisions, but he is also unable to save himself. This separation is particularly

noticeable when one compares Arthur to historical rulers who used tournaments, games, and trial by wagers to maintain a delicate "civil equilibrium," because instead of using the events as a tool to cement his own power, he falls into the trap of allowing Morgan le Fay to control the situation and exploit the challenge to such an extent that it could have very easily turned into a successful, albeit unintentional, assassination (Vale 143). Once Arthur rashly agrees to take up the Green Knight's challenge, there is no way for him to gracefully bow out of the situation and still maintain his honor and chivalric reputation. So by allowing Sir Gawain to rescue him from the Green Knight's challenge, he acts in the best interests of his country and allows him to maintain the reputation he is so eager to protect. Nevertheless, the fact that he found himself in that position in the first place shows that the king had let his preoccupation with the chivalric code grow to such proportions that it could be used to trap him in dangerous situations.

In both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and "Ywain and Gawain," Arthur's role in the challenge and judicial duel respectively seems demoted from king to that of a participant by the Green Knight and the elder sister. While Arthur is undoubtedly the most politically influential person, or player, on the board, he allows both the challenger and the lady to control the field because he does not want to break his own self imposed rules, because if he does then he invalidates his moral code and everything for which his kingdom stands. When Arthur allows the elder sister to use her gender to her

advantage and the Green Knight to use Camelot's reputation against him, he sends the message that he is a weak leader who can be easily circumvented by his subjects. Indeed, during both altercations the king relies on his subjects, specifically Sir Gawain to solve his sticky political situations for him because he is unwilling to risk his all-important reputation in a public affair where his court will witness his actions. When a king not only lets his subjects control his actions, but also relies on his inferiors to help him save face, he allows himself to fall to their level because he no longer rules them, but walks in the same situation and plays by the same rules that they do.

While literature hails King Arthur as one of the greatest kings of all time, when faced with public affairs that combine both chivalry and entertainment, the king allows his own power to be restricted by the chivalric code that he values so highly. Although one can argue that it is important for a ruler to follow some type of moral or legal code in order to ensure a fair and just reign, it appears that Arthur takes the idea too far because he allows the code to govern his kingship to the point where it limits his power as a ruler. One has to wonder, however, if Arthur, who is supposed to rule his realm through Divine Right with absolute power, is limited by the code that he chooses to follow, how tightly bound within the public realm of entertaining duels, tournaments, and challenges are those who must adhere to both the chivalric code and their king?

CHAPTER 2

The Subordination of the Agency of Nobles as it Relates to Entertainment

"You see," he said, "Might is not Right. But there is a lot of Might knocking about in this world, and something has to be done about it."

T.H. White

While Arthur *allows* his power as king to be bound by the chivalric code during public events, such as judicial duels, challenges, and tournaments, his knights are forced to follow his example; otherwise, they could tarnish the reputation of their king's utopia, not to mention risk losing their rank and standing as noble members in their society. Indeed, if all of Arthur's knights refused to fight to uphold his chivalric ideals, then others, who would fight, would be able to overcome his civilization with unopposed force. Within the Arthurian Tradition, public events such as judicial duels, challenges, and tournaments serve as tests to prove that those who represent Camelot adhere to their chivalric reputation. In several of the Sir Gawain romances, however, specifically *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, "Ywain and Gawain," "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain," and "The Awntyrs off Arthur at the Terne Wathelyne," the tournament, which is meant to showcase the chivalric nature of Camelot, actually limits the political agency of its defenders, specifically the knights, and their fellow nobles watching because they are, respectively, too distracted by attempting to adhere to the chivalric ideal and watching the entertaining spectacle. The

dual distractions of the chivalric ideal and the entertaining nature of the events in these romances serves to camouflage the fact that many citizens with legitimate political concerns fall by the wayside during Arthur's chosen political process.

As discussed in chapter one, it was believed that in the context of judicial duels, challenges, and tournaments that "God chose to give victory" to the party he deemed most worthy (Barker 20). The problem with the idea of a divine judge as the sole indicator of success on the field is that not only do both parties have to believe in the same deity, but it also ignores the idea that there are serious discrepancies in martial prowess between the combatants, because many of the knights of Camelot regularly use events such as those listed above to hone their skills and, as a result, have superior skills when compared those who come to face them. Deborah Higgens articulates the correlation between a militaristic vocation and tournament beautifully when she states "The correlation between an active tourneying career and an active military career was strong, and the *mêlée* was often the place where young knights learned military maneuvers and teamwork." (116). So even if the person bringing a suit to the king held the same beliefs in regard to the tournament, that God would insure their victory if they were in the right, it would still be difficult for a citizen with a legitimate political concern to willingly engage in a contest of strength with one of the best

trained knights in the kingdom because Camelot's knights' might would almost certainly be far greater than that of their opponent.

The militaristic nature of King Arthur's knights is displayed in a very interesting way in the romance "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain"; in this tale, readers can see what happens when a seemingly benevolent group of knights and their leader function as an army against an individual that they wish to overpower. While Camelot's knights normally attempt to help citizens, usually a lady, in one capacity or another, "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" is slightly different from many of the other Gawain romances because, instead of being a traditional romance, it is actually a "romance of arms and battle," which involves not just a tournament or public affair involving arms, but an actual battle in which several knights die (227). In order to understand how the tournament makes the knights of Camelot such deadly opponents, one should turn to Richard Kaeuper's *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Society* when he states:

> If the great game [war] was not always and everywhere available for knights to hone and demonstrate their prowess, tournament was available, even in the absence of war, as scholars regularly point out; it became the great sport and, in time, the great social event of chivalry. (164)

Kaeuper's quote shows readers that the whole purpose of these *à outrance,* and even *à plaisance* events is so that the knights can become as lethal as

possible for when they do have to face an opponent in combat. It is through the connection between the tournament and war that readers can see that because Arthur's knights participate in so many tournaments and challenges to test their chivalric prowess, or in other words they practice extensively, some of the men are almost impossible to beat, especially for lords like Sir Gologras who probably encounter tournaments much more infrequently. When an army combines not only the skills that the knights amass through their participation in the tournaments, but also their loyalty (or obedience) to their leader, which the chivalric code dictates they possess, the result is a group of men who will use their deadly talents with hardly any questions as to whether their leader's actions are right or not.

Now one has to realize that within the context of this poem Arthur is not only acting as king and the leader of their chivalric order, but also as a general to the soldiers following him, meaning that he has the right to declare Sir Gologras an enemy for his knights to attack and, even if they as nobles themselves may have some reservations about the situation, they are supposed to follow their commander's decree. The narrator's portrayal of both King Arthur and Sir Gologras in the poem is interesting because while Arthur is only after Sir Gologras' land because it is "the seymliast sicht that ever couth [he] se" and could possibly be used as a "[base] for military operations" that the king may choose to conduct in the future, the lord being attacked is described in a very positive, chivalric manner ("The Knightly Tale

of Gologras and Gawain" 255; Prestwich 206). Indeed, the narrator not only says that Sir Gologras is "ane wight weriour, wourthy and wise," but Sir Gawain and his comrades, Sir Lancelot and Sir Ewin (Ywain), believe him to be such a man that "ane blithar wes never borne of bane nor of blude" ("The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" 325; 3840). The narrator makes it clear that the three messengers think very highly of Sir Gologras and while maybe they do not agree with his opinion that service to Arthur is the equivalent of "bondage," it seems as if they hardly see his freedom as the atrocity that Arthur believes it to be ("The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" 436). The knights' comments about Sir Gologras, and Sir Gawain's later actions during the duel, make it clear that the knights do not necessarily have the same opinion about the situation as their commander does.

Now if Sir Gologras and Arthur had continued to allow their armies to fight on the battlefield, instead of both agreeing to a duel to decide the entire war, then Sir Gawain and the other messengers' reticence could have gone unnoticed. Once Sir Gawain becomes locked into the duel with Sir Gologras, however, he is forced to fight, despite the fact that he respects Sir Gologras as a knight and feels that his side's actions might not necessarily be right, or he will appear to be a disloyal follower who contradicts his ruler in public. Readers know that Sir Gawain wants the confrontation to end during the challenge because he offers Sir Gologras a deal so that the "thow salbe newit

at neid with nobillay eneuch, / and dukit in our duchery, all the duelling" and agrees to be led back to Sir Gologras' castle as a prisoner ("The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" 1071-1072). One has to wonder, however, why Sir Gawain does not try to do anything to stop the duel before it begins, because not only is Sir Gawain one of Arthur's most trusted knights in this area of the tradition, but he is also famed for his silver tongue. With this in mind, one has to wonder again why he does not put up any resistance to the event. The answer to this question seems to lie in both his reluctance to contradict his king and military commander in front of his fellow knights and the public nature of the tournament itself. The reason why Sir Gawain should not blatantly refuse his leader's orders in front of his brothers-at-arms can be answered easily by referring to the loyalty convention of the chivalric code. Sir Gawain's acceptance of his appointment to fight in Arthur's stead in the challenge without out so much as a political peep, however, can be read as something much more interesting than a knight who does not want to miss the chance to demonstrate his prowess.

Perhaps Sir Gawain's reluctance to use his own political standing as both a noble and a knight of Camelot to end the war, after Arthur realizes how bloody the battle is becoming and begins to look at alternative solutions, lies in the fact that Gawain realizes that if he refuses to fight, or even throws the tournament, the view of the knights of Camelot in the confrontation will shift from being noble men trying to spread chivalry near and far to that of

being aggressors against innocent people. The reasoning behind this statement is that by losing, or even declining the final confrontation, Gawain will cause the situation, in accordance with the rules of judicial duels, to be read as God choosing to side with Sir Gologras' suit and, by default, Arthur's army will be deemed as having less cause to win the battle. This situation gives a new meaning to the phrase "might makes right" because the winner of the duel duel between Sir Golorgas and Sir Gawain will prove by virtue of their might in the list that God chose to give their army the victory. The narrator himself even points out that "Criste cachis the cours" of encounter and Sir Gawain must realize that if Arthur's army loses in this final challenge then all of the deaths that occurred during the previous battles of the war can be laid at the young king's feet because no one made him attack Sir Gologras' realm ("The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" 1223). While the poem's lack of interiority makes it difficult to definitely prove, Sir Gawain, on some level, must realize all of the implications that come into play during the encounter; otherwise, he would not "rewit the renk, that wes riale" and go to the trouble of creating such an elaborate scheme and trusting "in [his opponent's] gentrice, but signete or sele" rather than just speaking up at the beginning of the matter ("The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" 1090; 1105). It seems too much to believe that a man so loyal to his king would make a pact on the battlefield that "wes newthir casar nor king thair quentance that knew" and go back to his adversary's castle to negotiate a

deal behind his liege's back if he did not strongly believe that something was not right with the situation ("The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" 1120)

Sir Gawain's loyalty to Arthur, the chivalric code, and the public nature of the knight and Sir Gologras' duel combine to restrict Sir Gawain's political options in the war to that of whispering a last minute plan in his opponent's ear during the confrontation. It is not only the bellicose romance "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" in which readers can see a knight's political options greatly reduced by a public tournament, because something similar happens in the "The Awntyrs off Arthur at the Terne Wathelyne", which takes place during a time of peace. During a later episode of this romance, a knight named Sir Galeron comes to Camelot to accuse Arthur of taking his lands and bestowing them on Gawain. Due to the fact that Sir Galeron feels as if Arthur "has wonen hem in were with a wrange wile / and geven hem to Sir Gawayn," the king allows Sir Galeron and Sir Gawain to duel for possession of the lands ("The Awntyrs off Arthur at the Terne Wathelyne"421-422). This challenge, which is similar to that of the sisters' problem in "Ywain and Gawain," again shows that when a citizen of Camelot brings a complaint to the king, the king himself does not deal with it, but instead organizes a tournament in which a battle based on might will determine the winner.

Now, one has to wonder if Sir Galeron is aware of his king's disinclination to solve suits by a political decision, rather than a challenge, judicial duel, or tournament, because interestingly enough the noble does not even ask Arthur to decide the matter as a king; he only asks him to "fight on a felde" ("The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne" 430). This willingness to fight is partly explained by Sir Galeron's statements that "fighting to fraist I fonded fro home" and the fact that he believes Arthur "has wonen hem in werre with a wrange wile," but one has to wonder why the noble, now that he has Arthur's full attention for his suit in open court, does not seek another course of action ("The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne" 412; 421). The reasoning behind Sir Galeron's anger, which readers can only speculate about because the narrator never divulges the lord's thoughts in the poem, seems to be that he, unlike Sir Gologras, did actually lose his land through a battle against King Arthur and, because his land was lost through battle, he seeks to win it back through the same means.

One can briefly read through "The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne" and notice how angry Sir Galeron is when he arrives in Arthur's court; however, one has to wonder if it is his anger that causes him to rashly decide that he will duel Sir Gawain to get his lands back or if he chooses to fight in the duel for his land because it is the only way he sees to reclaim the

property that he has lost. When the King asks Sir Galeron who he is and why he has come to Camelot, the knight tells Arthur:

> Mi name is Sir Galaron, withouten eny gile,
> The grettest of Galwey, of greves and [gyllis,]
> [Of Carrake, of Cummake, of Conyngame, of Kile,
> Of Lonwik, of Lannax, of Loudoune Hillus—]
> Thou has wonen hem in were with a wrange wile. ("The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne" 417-421)

Now as seen in "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain," once Arthur decides that he wants another noble's land or fealty it is not difficult for him to take by utilizing his knight's practiced might. The fact that Sir Galeron takes care to emphasize that the King came to possess his lands through war and the lord's care to come into the court in full armor shows readers that Sir Galeron may have come to Camelot spoiling for a fight because once his land was taken through battle, he sees battle as the only way to win it back from his opponent, because obviously if Galeron can beat one of Arthur's knights in a sanctioned judicial duel then he will be able to earn his land back.

What is perhaps most striking about Galeron and Gawain's duel is not that Arthur is using a tournament to decide a political matter, but that he allows so much splendor and pageantry to be put into the event. Indeed, Juliet Vale's use of the term "staging" in her essay "Violence and the Tournament" to describe the construction of the tournament grounds is

particularly useful here because of the way the building of the grounds resembles the setting of a stage prior to the arrival of the actors, meaning the *mise-en-scene* must be set perfectly in order to immerse the viewer in the event (Vale 155). While Vale does not make a comparison between the tournament and the theater in her work, it is interesting to note that in his anthology *Early English Stages*, Glynn Wickham sees the tournament as almost a precursor to the theater in that they both constituted a "festive occasion" which used "strife" to entertain (Wickham 15; 14). The narrator even tells the audience that the royal court uses the day prior to the tournament to set up ornate "listes bylyve" and to build Arthur a dais so that he can watch the show from a lofty vantage point ("The Awntyrs off Arthur at the Terne Wathelyne"477). The fact that Arthur and his men specifically set aside time in which to build an arena, or "a specially constructed enclosed area known as a list" for the confrontation shows that they are transforming Galeron's serious political grievance into something akin to a spectacle for their own enjoyment, complete with beautiful stage (Pederson 25). Perhaps it is the elaborate decorations that help the audience to forget that this tournament, like many others, is not just a form of entertainment, but also a method of solving political concerns.

In fact, the nobles, both those who are knights and those who are only watching from the lists, seem to be so wrapped up in the entertaining aspect of the tournament that they completely forget about its political facet.

Instead of seriously considering if Sir Galeron's holdings have been justly redistributed to Sir Gawain, the audience is too concerned with "galiard gret / for Gawayn the gode" to stop to consider if they are cheering for Gawain because they believe that he deserves the holdings or because he is one of the crowd's favorites when it comes to tournaments ("The Awntyrs off Arthur at the Terne Wathelyne" 493-494). It seems as if instead of blindly cheering for a champion, the audience should examine the whole situation and wonder if it could be them in the arena facing the might of one of Camelot's best fighters in a battle to save their home at a future date. In fact, two of the few members of the crowd not caught up in the fervor of the competition are Gwenivere, who is known as both Waynour and Gaynour in this text, and Galeron's sweetheart, who shows more concern for her lover's safety than the outcome of the day's entertainment. The fact that the only person who shows true concern over the possible death of Sir Galeron is Galeron's sweetheart leads readers to believe that the audience is so conditioned by the entertaining aspect associated with the tournaments and challenges that they do not see the people or actual situations at stake in the arena, only the event itself.

One of the few examples of the crowd breaking the entertainment barrier and realizing the physical danger associated with a tournament or challenge is in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when, as discussed in the first chapter, Arthur himself steps into the arena to behead the Green

Knight. It takes the possibility of the kingdom losing its heirless ruler to make the audience, who in this case is composed of Camelot's greatest lords and ladies, consider the political consequences of the exchange of blows. Indeed, once Gawain volunteers to take Arthur's place the:

> Ryche togeder con roun,
>
> And sythen thay redden all same,
>
> To ryd the kyng wyth croun
>
> And gif Gawan the game. (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 362-365)

Before Gawain volunteers to trade places with the king, which he does in an attempt to avert the possibility of his ruler's death, not a single other person in the room speaks out against the exchange. The narrator informs readers that when the nobles hear the Greek Knight issue his challenge, the crowd grows "stiller were thane / alle the heredmen in halle, the hyghe and the lowe" (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 301-302). Indeed, even after the Green Knight goads the knights to challenge him and they "wex as wroth as wynde" from his insults, it is still up to Arthur and Sir Gawain to react because the other players in this game have grown so accustomed to mindlessly watching from the sidelines that they, like their king in "Ywain and Gawain," are unable to take a stand against a participant in a tournament or challenge, despite the fact that they may "[pose] a threat to Arthur's court" by using "courtly etiquette" in a destructive manner (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; Higgens 121).

Several different scholars discuss the audience's inability to act in the first fitt of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Carl Grey Martin in his article "The Cipher of Chivalry: Violence as Courtly Play in the World of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" argues that it is the chivalric code and the tournaments and challenges that the knights use to prove their adherence to its conventions and standards that allows those who watch the events to "[sublimate] the horrors of physical destruction, especially the mutilation and ruin in combat of the human body" (311). While Martin's essay adopts the position that a noble code such as chivalry can be used to make people forget the violence of what they are watching, Martin Stevens in his article "Laughter and Game in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" argues that this encounter is really an example of "play" (66). Stevens further postulates that this encounter is one example of how the people participating in a game choose to construct a fictional worldview in which the spectacle they watch, which in this case is governed by the chivalric code, becomes a way for them to believe that their society can "govern the ungovernable" (66). Now, while both of these articles discuss the idea of the audience's innate belief that both combatants are engaged in this violent construct, it is Victor Scherb's article "The Tournament of Power: Public Combat and Social Inferiority in Late Medieval England" that, through a reference to *The Castle of Perseverance*, explains how through their role as spectators, "the noble part of the audience… become themselves a part of the theatrical spectacle of the

tournament" (109). While Scherb only touches on this at the beginning of his article, out of the three articles that discuss the crowd's reaction in the first fitt of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it is only his that attempts to move the audience from a role of passive observers, who are only watching the scene that unfolds before them, to participants in the display.

So while knights can be forced to exercise their might and adhere to the chivalric code during situations in which they may prefer to seek alternative means of resolution, such as in "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain," and King Arthur chooses to allow himself as king to be bound to the code which he prefers to champion, as discussed in reference to "Ywain and Gawain" and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the audience of nobles in the tales appears to choose to be just as bound by the rules that the participants follow due to their passive acceptance of the entertainment that they allow to engross them. The best way to prove that the audience is far too caught up in what they see is to analyze both their emotional investment in the action and their detachment from the knights in the list. One of the most gruesome examples of the audience's detachment from one of the players in an event is in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when Sir Gawain severs the Green Knight's head and the nobles at the feast "hit foyned with hir fete, there hit forth roled" (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 428). The idea of kicking around anyone's head, even if they were rude and unchivalric, should seem at least mildly repellent to such well-bred aristocrats; however, they

use his head as if it were a ball and do not seem that put off by the blood of a fellow noble spewing from it. Another example, albeit neither as gruesome nor as striking, occurs in "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" when the narrator tells the readers that upon misunderstanding that Gawain has lost the battle with Sir Gologras, Arthur and his knights behave:

> As all his welthis in warld had bene away went,
> And other bernys for barrat blakynnit thair ble,
> Braithly bundin in baill, thair breistis war blent. (1132-1134)

The interesting part of this passage is not that Arthur and his knights who were watching the event feel emotion in regard to the tournament, but that they only feel it over the fact that they think that they have lost. They do not even seem to consider the fact that Sir Gawain has been taken prisoner by their enemy in the war; they are only worried about the fact that their champion, and by extension their army, lost the battle. This extreme reaction to the loss of the battle, not their brother-at-arms and fellow knight, also shows how those who watch the tournament or challenges become extremely caught up in the action it entails. This is shown in passing in several romances including "Ywain and Gawain" when the narrator tells readers:

> thare was sone ful grete gendering
> for ilka man that walk might
> hasted sone to se that syght (3510-3512)

It is interesting that despite the corrupt nature of the duel, in which the older sister seeks to steal her father's land from her younger sister, so many people still choose to attend the event rather than electing to avoid a corrupt affair.

While the audience in the above mentioned romances might be only too happy to watch the spectacle play out for their own amusement and the knights are almost certainly heavily focused on the chivalric code, the behavior of the audience, knights, and King Arthur shows that Camelot is not the idyllic, chivalric society that they believe it to be because those who come before them with legitimate political concerns often fall by the wayside during the court's political process, or the duels and tournaments that Arthur uses to solve disputes. Two of the most obvious uses of the underlying corruption occur when Arthur uses his knights' might to seize new land to tax and redistribute to his chosen followers in "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" and "The Awntyrs off Arthur at the Terne Wathelyne." The fact that Arthur uses the lists as a way to gain land through combat, the knights help him to do this, and the audience passively watches the event shows that the court is not afraid to use and allow public events to further their own interests. One could argue that the court and audience have no reason to sympathize with the outsiders, Galeron and Gologras (Galeron is from the far north and Gologras does not live in Britain), and their political claims to their land, no matter how reasonable their side of the issue might be, because they are not British. Nevertheless, the failure of the court to act in the

disagreement between the two sisters in "Ywain and Gawain," despite the fact that they all agree that the older sister is out of line, strikes an eerie chord in regard to the system that the knights are so proud to represent, and Arthur has worked so hard to build, because it shows that not only is the system desensitized to the political problems concerning those that live outside of the realm, but also to those who reside within it.

Some philosophers would have people believe that might does not make right. In the Sir Gawain romances, however, specifically *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, "Ywain and Gawain," "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain," and "The Awntyrs off Arthur," one has to wonder if a strong retinue of knights and a passive audience does not disprove that theory. From King Arthur's blatant use of the duel and militaristic measures in "The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain" to the audience and knights' inability to stop the judicial duel on behalf of the younger sister in "Ywain and Gawain," readers are able to see that Camelot may not be the idyllic kingdom that Arthur and his knights believe it to be because not only will the men-at-arms in power fight in almost any challenge that they come across, but the audience who watches the encounter does not even try to see the political ramifications behind their spectacle because they are too busy enjoying themselves at the sight of someone else's dilemma.

Conclusion

While there is no way that Juvénal could have foreseen the rise of the tournament almost a thousand years after he died, it is interesting to examine the use of medieval entertainment to lull those involved in it into a political stupor. Once one analyzes the four Sir Gawain romances that heavily feature tournaments, challenges, and duels, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, "Sir Gologras and Sir Gawain," "Ywain and Gawain," and "The Awntyrs off Arthur at the Terne Wathelyne," it becomes apparent that Arthur chooses to adhere to the chivalric code rather than assume a firm role as leader and rule his people. Also, the king's subjects are either bound by the code as well, thereby reducing their ability to act as nobles, or too caught up in the spectacles they witness in the list to care about the reasons behind the day's event.

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